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ABSTRACT

A two-semester English-for-Special-Purposes (ESP) course designed for nursing students at a Japanese university is described, including the origins and development of the course, text development, and teaching methods. The content-based course was designed to meet licensure requirements for English language training, emphasized listening and speaking skills, and incorporated principles of accelerated learning. The instructional materials, a ten-chapter text per semester, was designed by the course developer. The serial melodrama was based on a story line concerning a nurse working in a large hospital and characters flexible enough for students to help develop their personalities. Increasingly serious medical story lines evolve, with cliff-hangers at the end of each chapter and a plot of high interest to students. Several classroom teaching techniques are highlighted including the playing of classical music during passive readings and a series of review and expansion activities. Classroom procedures are described. Testing consists of a series of true-false questions. Initial experience with the curriculum has been positive. Contains 6 references. (MSE)

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Nursing Matters

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Abstract

This paper introduces an ESP English course for nursing students at Miyagi University, a newly opened university in Miyagi Prefecture, Japan. The history of the development of the course is discussed and the final text and teaching methods are described in the hope that they will be of interest to others who are considering the development of such a course.

The Beginnings

The establishment of Miyagi University (MYU) was approved by the Mombusho (Japanese Ministry of Education) in January, 1997. The first students were accepted and then began classes in April, 1997. The student body included a class of 89 students enrolled in a four-year nursing course. This paper, which retains much of the casual style of the presentation on which it is based, addresses the development of a freshman English course for these students.

I first became involved with MYU in the Fall of 1995, when I was approached by prefectural officials and asked if I would consider becoming the Director of the Language Center. As part of the vetting procedure, I was asked to develop a complete English program for both the university students and adults from the outside community. I was given no criteria nor was I given any goals. I was simply asked by the President-designate to design whatever I thought was appropriate. I strongly believe that goals should guide curriculum development but I had none in this case, so as people often do in a case like this I fell back on previous experience.

While teaching at Trident College, Nagoya, Japan, I had supervised the development and application of a content program for teaching English (Adamson & Moneyhun, 1986). On the basis of student feedback, teacher feedback, grades, and standardized testing, I had realized that such a program could to be very effective and had become convinced that content is often, if not always, a more appropriate vehicle for learning English than the language itself. After leaving Trident, I worked at the Shizuoka Institute of Science and Technology, a four-year university for technical students. Although I worked on the set-up committee for a month before the university opened, I had not been involved in the setting up of the curriculum. However, during the third year of the school's existence I was elected coordinator of the English teachers and was assigned to the committee to revise the entire curriculum. Partly due to my insistence, it was decided to introduce a content English class for the engineering students. Although I left the university before the revisions were completed, I became even more convinced that content is frequently an optimal approach to language teaching.

In view of these experiences, I decided that, in the absences of specific goals, a content approach would be my best choice for the MYU nursing students. The

MYU Set-Up Committee was using a procedure of successive approximations to develop the university-wide curriculum, so I received information (sometimes final and sometimes transitory) in small chunks and was forced to revise the proposed curriculum many times.

At one point after I was actually hired and officially working for the MYU Set-Up Committee, I finally had a chance to meet with the Dean-designate for the Nursing Department and find out what she expected from the English courses. She indicated that there was a legal requirement that the students have at least 120 hours of college English in order to get their license upon graduation (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1993, pg. 43). She wanted this requirement met during a first year required course. She indicated that for this course she wanted a basic communicative English curriculum with a large amount of stress on listening and speaking. Later courses would be electives with the primary goal of preparing the students for the reading assignments that they might receive in graduate level nursing courses.

At this point it became possible to begin to plan an actual curriculum. It was obvious that the Dean's requirements could be fulfilled within the ESP type course that I had been considering. I also decided that it would be effective to incorporate some ideas from accelerated learning.

I received formal training in Suggestopedia in 1979 and have been experimenting with ways of adapting the method for use in Japanese college classrooms. I have developed a methodology called "Integrative Teaching" (Adamson, 1995). This method uses a long narrative story as the basis of a course. During a unit the students read a chapter consisting of about 2000 running words. The classes are arranged so that the students read the text three or four times and do activities related to the story. The details as they apply to the MYU nursing course are described below.

The MYU Set-Up Committee determined that the ESP Nursing English course would meet for three 90-minute periods a week. I arranged the schedule to insure that a group of students always met with the same teacher. This provided the contact time and continuity that are necessary for Integrative Teaching to work successfully.

The next order of business was to prepare the text. MYU policy insists that each semester consist of a full 15 weeks. This meant that one semester would involve 45 classes, with 90 for the entire year. Considering tests, reviews, and expansions I decided that 10 chapters a semester would be appropriate. This would allow an introductory week and four weeks of review, expansion, and tests during the first semester and, during the second semester, three weeks of review, expansion, and tests plus two weeks at the end to read and work with one of the basic nursing texts (Henderson, 1969). I decided to give 90-minute tests at the end of the review and expansion week following Chapters 4, 7, 10, 14, 17, and 20. There would be no test on the Henderson paper and it will not be mentioned again here.

After some brainstorming with the teachers involved, I began working on the plot design for a story about a nurse. She was going to work at a large hospital and the

plot was to be a human drama revolving around the people and events in her life. It was to be a melodrama with a cliffhanger at the end of each chapter. Once the story was more or less plotted, I was not very happy with it. I got feedback from one of the other teachers, and we decided that the story would not work very well. One of the main reasons for this was that the story tended to naturally involve a lot of conflict, something that we did not think was appropriate. A further point was that the nurses in the story would have strongly defined characters and personalities. We thought that this might make it hard for our students to relate to them. Also the plot required more knowledge of nursing procedures than we had and that from a point of view that did not seem to have much potential for being developed into classroom activities of the communicative types that we planned.

Finally the teachers were called to a weekend long working meeting at which a new story was plotted with a cliffhanger at the end of each chapter and the characters were given backgrounds, personalities, and other personal data. This plot revolved around a family that had numerous medical problems and thus interacted with doctors and nurses. This plot seemed to allow us the most flexibility in designing class activities. The family members and non-medical characters had well-defined personalities and backgrounds, but the medical personal, especially the nurses, were less defined. This would allow the students to build personalities for them.

The Story

Basically the story is a melodrama that revolves around a series of increasingly serious medical situations that effect the lives of the characters. There are a variety of interwoven themes, including the various medical problems, a growing friendship and its violent ending, the beginnings of a love story, the interactions between the various characters, drug use, alternate medical treatments, alternate lifestyles, teenage pregnancy, and the ethics of transplanting bodily parts. All of these and much more are brought out and exploited in the classroom. A list of important characters and chapter synopses are given in the appendix.

The Text

The final story is the result of collaboration between myself and Professor Lyn Doole, MYU. It is of high interest to the students. We know this because they frequently voluntarily read the English version of the text in order to discover what happens next. They can not wait the few additional minutes that it will take for the translated version to be distributed to the class. Each chapter consists of two parts: an English only text and an English/Japanese version. The English only version is laid out to resemble a normal English novel, except that it is A4 sized and line numbers are given in the margins. The English/Japanese version is laid out in the form of a long table where each English sentence appears in a vertically separate box. The Japanese translation appears in a corresponding box on the right of the original English sentence. We are now in the process of revising the text. Where appropriate, the new edition will have vocabulary, idiom, and cultural notes added to the boxes.

The Classes

One of the strong points of using a novel as the basis of the class is that there are many different ways of exploiting it. One of the teachers is using traditional teaching methods, including one period a week in the Language Lab. Another teacher is using cooperative learning. I am using Integrated Teaching, the version of accelerated learning that was mentioned above. In the following I will detail my classes.

Classes are on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. I use one week to cover a chapter. On Tuesday I give a suggestopedic type concert session and on Wednesday and Thursday the students work with the text and elaborations.

The Concert Sessions

The concert session consists of two readings of the text: the active session and the pseudo-passive session. Details can be found in Lozanov (1988).

During the active session, the first reading, the teacher reads the text aloud, slowly and clearly, following the rhythms and volume of the classical music that is playing. New words can be extended to two beats per syllable to give them stress. Metaphorically speaking, the teacher makes his or her voice resemble another instrument in the orchestra. This music is what Lozanov (1978, 270) calls "emotional." Much of the music composed by Hayden, Mozart, and Beethoven fits in this category of music, which exhibits wide swings of volume and changes of rhythm. While the teacher is reading, the students follow along in the bilingual text, marking new words or other interesting points. This is the reason for the term "active." The students are active with their pencils.

During the pseudo-passive session, the second reading which immediately follows the first reading, the students sit back and close their eyes as they listen to the teacher read the text again. They are given the suggestion that they visualize what is happening in the story. This time the teacher reads with normal intonation. Lozanov (1978, 270) calls this music "philosophical" and some compositions by Vivaldi, Corelli, and Mozart as well as others fit in this category, which tends to exhibit steady rhythms and volumes. Much of it is organ music.

At the end of the second concert session, the students are released for the day.

Elaborations

The remaining two days of class are used for the elaboration, which consists of the alternating periods during which the students read the text or do activities.

Reading the Text

The reading of the text is done with a procedure called "shadowing" which was first brought to my attention by Dr. Tim Murphey, Nanzan University. The way that I do shadowing in the classroom varies as we move through the text. In the first weeks the teacher reads a phrase and the students repeat it while looking at the text. After a few weeks the teacher reads continuously and the students read aloud at the

same speed. As soon as the students are proficient at this, the teacher introduces a new procedure and alternates it with the previous two. This new procedure is simple; the teacher reads a phrase and the students repeat it without looking at the text. The length of the phrases is gradually increased and the length of the pauses is gradually decreased so that the students are soon repeating as the teacher reads. Early in the second semester, the students are placed in pairs and one reads while the other repeats. Their reading speed gradually increases as they have more and more practice. Shadowing speed follows along naturally. The students enjoy doing this and there is a lot of laughter when they are in pairs. While there are many benefits to be gained from this activity, the primary gain is an increase in the length of the student's verbal memory for English, a vital component of increasing competence in the language.

The Activities

The reading of the text is periodically interrupted for the students to do an activity based on the language or ideas contained in the passages they have just read. In my classes I use many information gap activities based on pictures, additional readings, etc. The students also make up and tell stories that explain sets of facts about themselves or the characters in the text. I attempt to vary the activities as much as possible so that the students are constantly doing something new. At the beginning of the year these activities are fairly structured but become less and less so as the year goes on. The students also do role-plays based on situations in the text.

From the very beginning I encourage free conversation in which the students use English to talk about subjects of their own choice. At the beginning of the year I use structured activities like the following:

The students are given some sentence frames from the text and asked to generate new sentences. For example, a sentence in the section of the text that they have just read may read "As she is speaking, her grandfather enters the room." The students would be given the frame "As she is XXXing, someone YYYs." They are given four or five frames and asked to write new sentences based on their own experience or their imagination. When they have finished, they are placed in groups. One member of the groups is selected to role play a famous person and the others become reporters. The 'famous person' then reads one of their sentences and each of the 'reporters' must ask at least two sentences about the content. Usually at least one of the groups finds something interesting and begins a real discussion in which they are trying to get information from each other. When this happens, I let the activity continue even though the other groups may have finished. Using non-verbal language I make it clear that the group that is actually conversing is doing what I want. After that it becomes easier and easier to get the students to actually talk to each other. I never know exactly which activity is going to be the one to trigger a real conversation, but I keep giving them activities of this type until it happens. Soon after this happens for the first time, I can give the students a suggested topic from the text, but make it clear that as long as they are speaking English any subject is acceptable.

During the elaboration, I occasionally do visualizations as a lead-in to another activity. I also give the students dictations based on the text. At the beginning I read the sentences, but later I have the students work in small groups, reading the sentences themselves.

The above has barely touched on the possibilities. The activities that are done in class can be selected to fit the teacher's methodological preferences. Just about anything that the teacher believes in will achieve positive results. As long as the teacher is able to congruently present the activities as a way to learn English they will work.

Review and Expansion

During these classes the plot is reviewed and the students do activities based less on the text than on associated ideas. The review is the least communicative part of the course, because the goal is the mastery of clearly defined data rather than communicative ability. The expansion, however, is probably the most communicative because the students are putting forth their own ideas about things that are not actually stated in the text.

Plot review is accomplished through both teacher and student generated materials. Teacher generated materials consist of exercises which force the students to review the plot and the characters. For example, the students might be given a list of words from the text and asked which character they refer to or they might get a summary of the plot with the paragraphs scrambled and be asked to put them in order. An example of an activity based on student generated materials would be a class in which the students first wrote a description of one of the characters without naming the character. Other students would then read the passage and guess which character was being referred to in the passage.

Expansion activities extend the ideas from the text into new areas. Storytelling is a frequent activity here. The students are asked to think about a situation in the text and tell a story about something that happened to them. This story is to somehow relate to the situation in the text.

Testing

Since this is a required course, we decided that students who study should be rewarded with a higher grade. We also know from experience that students save exams and pass them to the following years' students. Therefore, we have decided on the following testing procedure. We are writing numerous true/false questions about each chapter. When we have a few hundred per chapter, we will make the list available to the students. Tests will use questions drawn randomly from the lists. Tests are open book (English only version of the text and a dictionary) and 90-minutes in length. Each test consists of more than 200 questions and is machine scored. So far the averages on the tests have been right around 70 points.

Grading

Each semester the students take three tests. Of these the two with the highest

grades are selected and each carries a weight of 30% of the final grade. The other 40% of the grade is based on attendance and classwork.

Conclusion

While this course has not yet been used for a full year, the teachers are quite happy with it. The feedback from the students is positive and they have become engrossed in the plot. We have no external measure with which to check the students' progress, but the teachers see sufficient progress in their classes to wish to keep the course in place. We are now engaged in making small changes to the text so that the classroom activities that we wish to use are more closely integrated to the plot. We also hope to add some vocabulary and plot/character centered review activities to the appendix that contains the translations.

The experience of preparing and teaching this text has further reinforced my belief that ESP through content is a viable and even preferable way to approach language teaching.

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Appendix: Plot Outline

The following Chapter synopses appear in the text at the beginning of the appropriate chapter. The information in the parentheses does not appear in the text but is added here for clarity.

The following are the main characters:

Valerie Thurber (the mother)

Vernon Thurber (the father)

Bryce Thurber (the son)

Beverly Thurber (the daughter)

Starlight (the Thubers' ex-hippie neighbor who is an expert on alternative medicines)

Taro (a Japanese exchange student who becomes Bryce's friend)

Maria (one of the nurses who becomes Bryce's love interest)

Additional nurses and doctors who appear for varying lengths of time

Chapter 1: The Unwanted Telephone Call. In which the women of the Thurber family cannot complete the census form by themselves; Willard cannot find his glasses; Nurse Wilson arrives to dress Thelma's foot, and then shows the Thurber women how to complete the census form; and an emergency telephone call is received.

Chapter 2: At the Hospital. In which Willard complains about Starlight working on his motorcycle in the driveway; Vernon calls home from his car while on the way to the hospital; Nurse Wilson tells Valerie, Beverly, and Thelma what will happen to Bryce at the hospital; Bryce answers Nurse Jones' questions in the Emergency Ward; Dr. Smith's preliminary diagnosis is cystic fibrosis; and Dr. Smith decides that Bryce needs an immediate emergency procedure.

Chapter 3: In the Emergency Ward. In which Bryce is X-rayed and has an operation; medication is prescribed and a sputum culture done; Vernon arrives by himself to see Bryce; Vernon spends time in a waiting room but cannot smoke; Starlight and Valerie arrive; there is talk about some alternative treatments; and Bryce thinks he is going to die.

Chapter 4: A Visit with Bryce in the Hospital. In which Willard has a fit; Valerie calls the hospital about visiting hours; Samantha goes fishing; the Thurber family decide who is going to visit Bryce at the hospital and who will stay home with Willard; and Valerie and Vernon see Bryce and talk with Dr. Hotchkiss.

Chapter 5: Cystic Fibrosis. In which the Dr. Hotchkiss gives a difficult explanation of cystic fibrosis, Nurse Jefferson explains it so the Thurbers can understand, the family discusses the disease, Starlight gives his version, Samantha goes fishing again, Nurse Wilson explains more about cystic fibrosis, and Vernon collapses.

Chapter 6: Vernon goes to the Hospital. In which Nurse Wilson says Vernon has had a heart attack, Thelma calls an ambulance, Vernon and Valerie ride to the hospital in the ambulance, Valerie talks to Nurse Jones, Doctor Smith examines Vernon, and Doctor Smith explains Vernon's condition to Valerie.

Chapter 7: In Bryce's Hospital Room. In which Nurse Jefferson tells Bryce what happened to him and then gives him some medicine, a sponge bath, and explains the hospital routine; Bryce talks to his roommate; and Dr. Hotchkiss tells Bryce his preliminary diagnosis and explains that he will be seeing a specialist.

Chapter 8: The Shark in the Fish Tank. In which Dr. Courtland, the cystic fibrosis specialist, sees Bryce; Starlight eats Beverly's lunch; Willard thinks there is a shark in the fish tank; Starlight recommends Chinese herbal medicine for Bryce; and Nurse Wilson tells them that the seaweed dressing recommended by Starlight has the same active ingredient as the dressing that she is putting on Thelma's foot.

Chapter 9: The Specialist's Diagnosis. In which Beverly tries to talk to Valerie, Dr. Courtland calls, Valerie goes to Bryce's hospital, she and Bryce talk to Dr. Courtland, the specialist, and Dr. Courtland gives his diagnosis.

Chapter 10: Beverly's Big News. In which Beverly is still trying to talk to Valerie but she is busy discussing what Bryce should do, Willard almost falls out a window, Beverly becomes very frustrated, Starlight joins the conversation, and Beverly finally tells her big news. (Beverly announces that she is pregnant.)

Chapter 11: A phone call to Roz. In which Valerie can not sleep so she calls her friend and tells about the problems in her life: Thelma's foot, Willard's craziness, Bryce's CF, Vernon's heart attack, and her own Repetitive Strain Injury, and Beverly's pregnancy.

Chapter 12: Willard Makes Popcorn. In which Taro visits Bryce in the hospital and teaches him some Japanese, Nurse Mark Taylor tells Vernon about his new health regime, and Willard decides to make popcorn.

Chapter 13: After the Fire. In which the Fire Department puts out the fire, Starlight regrets the loss of his marijuana crop, Beverly goes to pre-natal class, Thelma considers what to do about Willard, and Nurse Taylor warns Thelma about the possible loss of the house.

Chapter 14: Health Care in Japan. In which Beverly does pre-natal exercises; Thelma visits Starlight; and Maria and Taro talk about hospitals in the US and Japan.

Chapter 15: Nurse Wilson Leaves for Africa. In which Nurse Wilson tells about herself and why she is returning to Africa; Starlight gives Beverly nutritional supplements; and Beverly and Vernon go for a walk; and Bryce is gone. (A new patient is in Bryce's bed and they are told by another patient that Bryce is dead.)

Chapter 16: Unhappy Endings. In which Vernon and Beverly find that Bryce is still alive and has gone in for surgery; the telephone disappears; Willard loses control and is hospitalized; and the heart and lungs are not given to Bryce.

Chapter 17: Starlight's Situation. In which we learn about how Bryce spent Christmas and what has happened to the others since the day of Bryce's aborted operation; there are guards in the hall; Starlight goes south; someone tries to break into

Starlight's house; Starlight visits Bryce and tells about his situation; and Starlight gives Bryce a new metaphor.

Chapter 18: Taro Returns. In which there is another snow storm; Maria tries to find out what Starlight has been giving Bryce; Maria and Bryce talk about dreams; Taro enters and joins the conversation; more about the reason for the guards; there is a black out on Maple Street; and Beverly has a back ache.

Chapter 19: Gunfire at UH. In which Starlight comes with light and heat; Beverly's water breaks; they start for the hospital in Kim Park Lee's truck; Maria and Taro are stranded in Bryce's room; Taro needs to go to the bathroom; and there is gunfire in the hallway. (Taro is shot in the head.)

Chapter 20: Nursing Matters. In which Taro goes to Emergency; Beverly has a baby; there is an emergency transplant operation; Maria learns more about treating patients as people; and the family decides that nursing matters. (A happy ending for everyone except Taro who dies, but his heart and lungs are used to save Bryce.)